TALBOT COUNTY
SOLAR ARRAY COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

Date of meeting: Thursday, July 14, 2016

Location: 215 Bay Street, Conf. Room 1, Easton, MD 21601

Attendees: Mary Kay Verdery, Mike Pullen, Dirck Bartlett, Chuck Callahan, Ed Heikes, Jeremy Rothwell, Frank Cavanaugh, Scott Kane, Ryk Lesser, John Swaine, Corey Buxton, Jeff Rothwell

1. **Meeting opened at 5:00 p.m.**

2. **Introduction.** Mary Kay Verdery led the introduction and provided background on the group's mission.

3. **Topics discussed.**

   a. **Cell towers as a model**. When the County added a cell tower section to the zoning ordinance several years ago, this included the concept of priority placement areas. It was noted that this could provide a possible model for solar development in the County.

   b. **Substations, transmission lines, and connecting to the grid**. Developers seek to locate distributed solar facilities near substations and transmission lines, usually within a half mile, because these provide the most efficient access to the electrical grid. Identifying where substation and transmission lines are in the County would help to show where solar development is likely. Utility companies receive many requests for access along the Route 50 corridor and Cordova Road where transmission lines run. Generally solar developers

contact utility companies up front to ensure that they will be able to connect at a given location, but sometimes the utilities aren't notified until the last minute, as in MEBA's case. The cost to connect to the grid can be quite expensive, up to $40,000 in certain cases. Connecting to the grid typically requires the execution of an agreement between the owner of the system and the utility company.

c. Route 404 facility. The new solar facility on Route 404 in Queen Anne's County is a 10MW facility on approximately 80 acres. Johns Hopkins owns it and possibly uses virtual net metering to offset energy use at its Baltimore facilities.

d. Community solar facilities. This is a new concept that the State is rolling out right now using a pilot program. The idea is that multiple energy users would pool resources to construct and operate a shared solar facility instead of multiple systems to serve each user separately.

e. Maps. There was discussion of creating a map that would show key solar-related characteristics in the County, such as soil types, conservation easements, substations, and scenic byways. This map could be used to identify where solar development is likely and where it should be directed.

f. Carport solar facilities. Both Chesapeake College and a local SHA facility have solar panels on carports. There was general consensus that these types of projects should be favored because they are located on existing improved property as opposed to ag land or undeveloped property.

g. Solar credits. Federal tax credits and State renewable energy credits typically accrue to whoever the owner of the solar facility is.

h. Permitting of solar facilities under current law. Based on the County's wind turbine requirements, a building permits is required for

facilities 100kw or less and a special exception is required for facilities greater than 100kw.

i. **Solar facilities in the County today.** These include MEBA, which is 1 MW on 5 acres, and Target, which has a significant rooftop solar installation.

j. **Soil types**. Ag land contains different soil types, some of which are considered better than others for production purposes. Maps showing soil types are available. Soils do not conform to property boundaries, however, meaning that ag parcels will likely have multiple soil types. This may make tying solar development to soil type more difficult.

k. **Ag transfer tax**. According to the Attorney General's office, when ag land is converted to solar use, the ag transfer tax applies. Some of this money comes back to the County. The ag transfer tax generally plays a bigger role in counties like Anne Arundel which have a great deal of farm land but also lots of development.

l. **Mitigation**. A question was posed as to whether acre-to-acre mitigation is legal and if so what limits are there. Forest conservation requirements, which sometimes result in more ag land being eliminated, must be considered as well.

m. **Maintenance.** If solar arrays are left untended, grasses and other noxious weeds might grow up hampering productivity and creating an eyesore. State law prohibits certain noxious weeds, such as Johnson grass and thistle.

4. **Next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, July 19th.**

5. **Meeting adjourned at 7 p.m.**